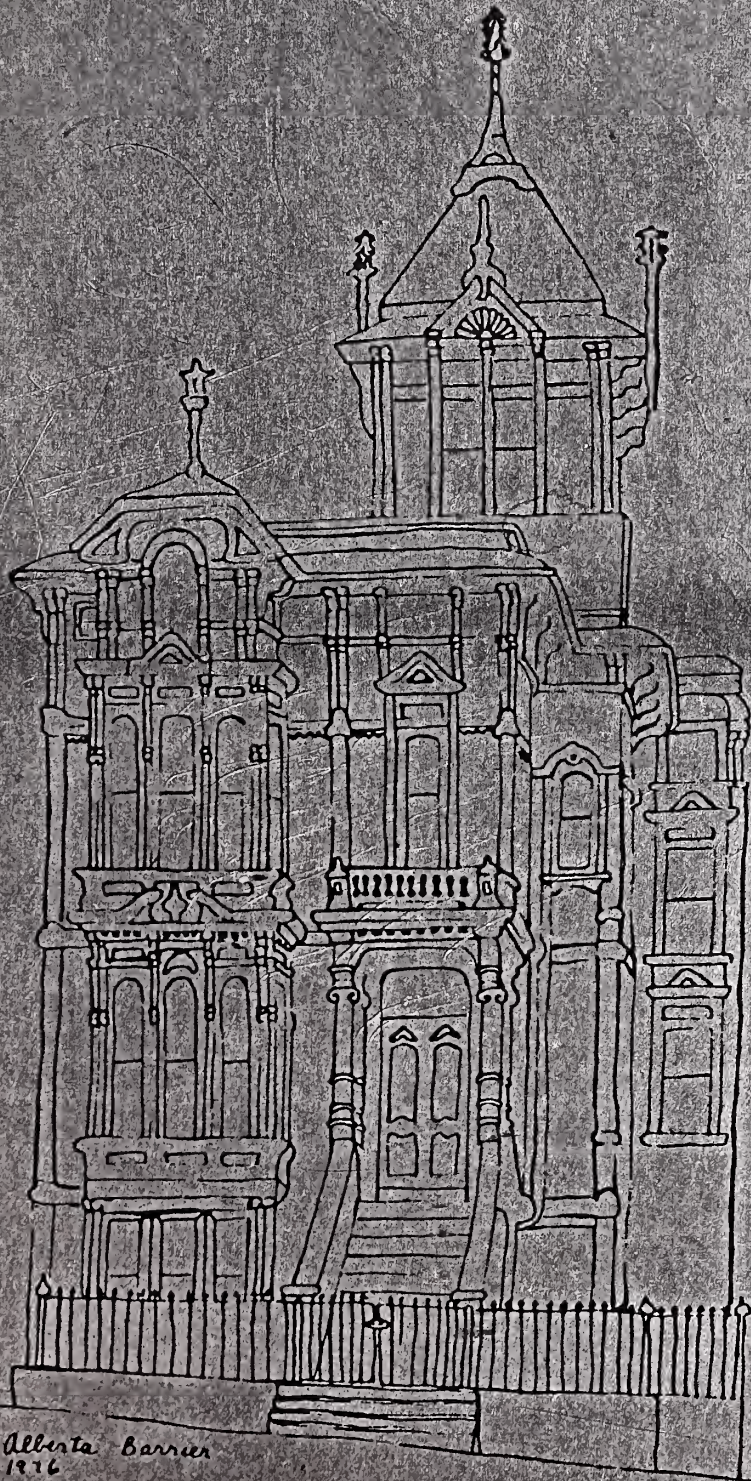


Victorian House Tour

*6 Victorian Houses in San Francisco's
Historic ALAMO SQUARE*



*Sunday
October 7, 1979
1-5 PM*

*TOUR STARTS AT 1198 FULTON STREET
(CORNER SCOTT)*

SPONSORED BY:
THE VICTORIAN ALLIANCE



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Welcome to the Victorian Alliance tour of historic houses in the Alamo Square area. This is a part of San Francisco which must seem familiar to everyone, for the row of colorful Steiner street houses, silhouetted against the downtown skyscrapers, is one of the most photographed scenes in the City, and, as a result, has acquired the informal name "postcard row."

In the 1850's, Alamo Hill, as the area was then known, was a favorite location for games of cowboy and Indians. The three Van Ness ordinances of 1855 and 1856 designated eleven such parks and squares throughout the City, and Alamo Square first appears so named on the City maps of 1859. In 1873, the City Attorney acted to eject squatters, and in 1892, the square was graded at a cost of \$25,333. Eight live springs still exist in the park, resulting in tufts of greener grass and patches of wet, spongy areas. Originally, many houses had private water systems, which complicates tracing the history of the houses, as Water Department records play an important part in such research.

In the 1890's, the district developed as one of the most fashionable in the City, thanks to its pleasant climate and panoramic views combined with its proximity to the business district downtown. The area presents, in microcosm, a summary of the dynamics of the history of the City. The earliest houses, with one exception, date from the predominantly German original occupation of the neighborhood. German-born residents lived in houses designed by German-born architects, which they built in the environs of the German (now Franklin) Hospital. It was the custom of the time for the various national groups to live near their own hospitals, for they distrusted the medical ministrations of "foreigners."

Later, Irish moved into the area, and houses which were built during that period are also included on this tour. Then, for a while, the population was predominantly Russian-Jewish, with the Hebrew Orphan Asylum located on the entire Divisadero-Hayes-Scott-Grove block. Briefly, before WW II, there was a Japanese influx until they were resettled during that war. At that time, blacks who had come to the City to work in the war-time industries, settled into the newly-vacated former Japanese housing.

In the mid-50's, following the demolition of thousands of Victorian structures by the San Francisco Redevelopment Agency, private owners started the rehabilitation and restoration of the remaining Victorians. Today, the area is more mixed and enjoys greater stability than ever.

The owners of the houses which are on today's tour all support the on-going movement to have Alamo Square declared an Historic District. There is only one Historic District in the City presently--the Jackson Square commercial district. Several blocks in Webster Street, in Pacific Heights, are now under consideration to become the first residential Historic District in the City. Criteria which will be established in that designation will be used in determining the designations of Alamo Square and other future Historic District declarations.

In consideration to the owners of the houses, it is requested that there be no smoking in the houses.



This grandly impressive Stick-Eastlake was designed by Heinrich Geilfuss in 1889 and built at a cost of \$9,985. The German-born and trained architect also designed St. Mark's Lutheran Church on O'Farrell between Gough and Franklin, and a number of houses near Alamo Square: 1214, 1216, 1218 and 1260 Fulton, 640-42 Steiner, 829-31 Fulton and 824 Grove, which is on this tour.

The owner for whom Geilfuss built 1198 Fulton was German-born William Westerfeld, a prosperous baker, confectioner and restaurateur. He lived to enjoy the house only about five years; his widow and sons sold it about 1896.

The buyer was John J. Mahony of Mahony Brothers, a major contracting firm which after the 1906 fire put up the Palace Hotel, the Bank of California, the Flood, Shreve and Phelan Buildings. Both pre- and post-fire St. Francis Hotels were the work of Mahony Brothers.

In his residence here, Mahony widened the hall and the stairs, built the garage for one of the City's first Stanley Steamers and built the flats to the east of the house on what had originally been the rose garden of the property. Mahoney also let his friend Marconi broadcast from the tower with the 360° view. Mahony died about 1918, and his children kept the house another decade.

In the 1930's, the White Russians used the building as a social center, where they installed a restaurant "Dark Eyes" in the basement ballroom. More recently the building has enjoyed a varied and sometimes bizarre occupancy thoroughly commensurate with its spectacular architecture. A magician who kept 500 candles burning once lived in the tower room when the house was a rooming house prior to its purchase by the present owners.

The present interior furnishings are completely in keeping with the grand scale and elaborately carved woodwork of the rooms, resulting in an interior in the romantic aristocratic tradition of northern Europe prior to World War I.

The Phelps House



A restless lot, some of these early houses. And this one, believed to date from 1850, is the most peripatetic of them all. And small wonder. According to a descendant of Abner Phelps, the builder, the house originated in New Orleans in 1850 and was shipped around Cape Horn in sections to ease the homesickness of Phelps' bride, southern-born Augusta Roussell. At the time of its erection in 1851, the dwelling stood in the midst of Phelps' 160-acre homestead at the foot of Buena Vista Hill.

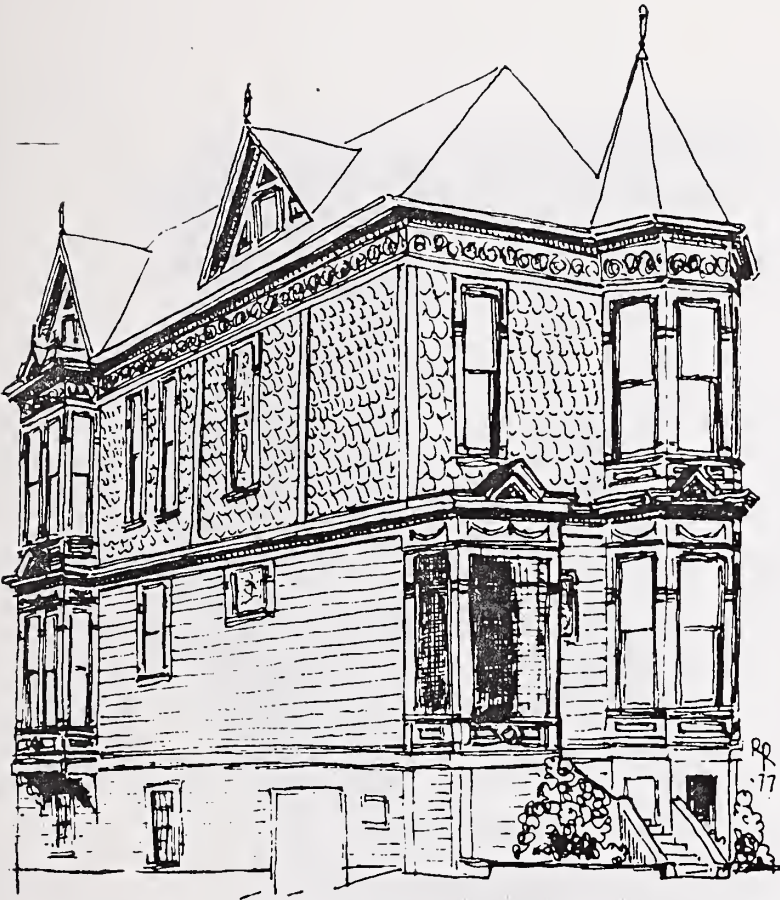
The present location of the house is the third site it has occupied. The most recent move, finished recently, rotated the house 180° so that it would form the center of the enclosure of the Phelps Place Historic District, the acclaimed restoration project of the Preservation Group, which restored the three other houses which comprise the project.

In its present location, the house has a commanding site, in which its traditional Louisiana style design on its high foundation, can be seen and appreciated. The Phelps house is reputedly the oldest residential structure in San Francisco, is City Landmark Number 32, as well as being listed on the National Register, as is the spectacular Mish House, the house to the right. The entire project is a superb example of adaptive re-use of old structures which have outlived their original function.

This large Queen Anne style house was built in 1891 to the designs of Charles L. Havens, later of the firm Havens & Toepke which designed 925 Fulton near Alamo Square and the original Mission High School. Havens was also responsible for 1463-65 McAllister, near Scott. New York-born Havens came to San Francisco at the age of seven. He worked for architect Peter R. Schmidt from 1878 through 1881 and then was his partner until setting up on his own in 1887. He supervised contracts for the Ohloff House amounting to more than \$18,000, a very healthy sum in those days. The plumbing contract alone, at \$2,962, was double or triple the usual amount.

The owner who commissioned Havens was James Scobie, a railroad contractor who was later active in real estate. He owned several lots at this corner, and this magnificent house was his residence. About the turn of the century, Scobie sold it to Nicholas Ohlandt, not to be confused with Henry Ohloff, the priest-organizer from Canon Kip Community Center, for whom the present Episcopalian rehabilitation center is named. Ohlandt was the founder of the German Bank and the National Ice Company, and was one of the multi-millionaires of the time.

On the outside of the house, notice its towers and bays, its many decorated gables and shadowy recesses, its arches, pediments and swags. Fish-scale shingles compete with two different widths of horizontal siding, with lattice-work and bas-reliefs. Inside you'll find mahogany paneled doors and walls, parquet floors and original art-glass windows which give one the feeling of being inside a prism, coved ceilings and plaster carvings.



Matthew C. Kavanagh, real estate, is first listed as living at the S. E. corner of Grove and Steiner Streets in the 1893-94 City Directory. Water Department records show that water service was connected on 11 June 1892. This elaborately detailed mansion was the first built, then the one on the adjoining lot, and, finally, the rest of the row along Steiner Street facing Alamo Square. This must be one of the most frequently photographed group of houses in the City, with the highrise downtown skyline in the background.

As a builder and developer, Kavanagh was quite eclectic in the choice of design and details for his house. Transcending its time, the simple lines and graceful proportions reflect the best of several eras. Appearing to be Eastlake in style, it is really Queen Anne, with typical fish scale shingles. The exterior is free of the heavy applied woodwork that was typical of the period. The subtle octagonal corner bay is reminiscent of the Second Empire style of two decades earlier. One sees delicate touches of neo-classic ornament--laurel swags and acanthus leaves boldly predating trends of decades to follow. In the well thought-out composition ornament is tastefully subordinate to form, very inconsistent with its time.

This house has experienced the decline that characterized the neighborhood, having held an alcoholic de-toxification center and a nursing home, as well as other occupants, until its purchase and renovation by the present owner. Details of interior wood trim and plaster ornamentation are particularly noteworthy. The stained glass windows in the living room and on the stairs are original and are said to be of German manufacture. The windows in the entry hall, bathroom, and kitchen are of modern manufacture, created by a recent occupant of the house. The ornate mirror over the living room fireplace is an unrestored original, having been brought around the Horn from New York in 1872 for the Fulton mansion at Scott and Oak Streets, from which the present owner recently acquired it. The gas chandelier in the back parlor is a recent purchase of the owner. It was made in England and is of the period of the house.

813 Grove

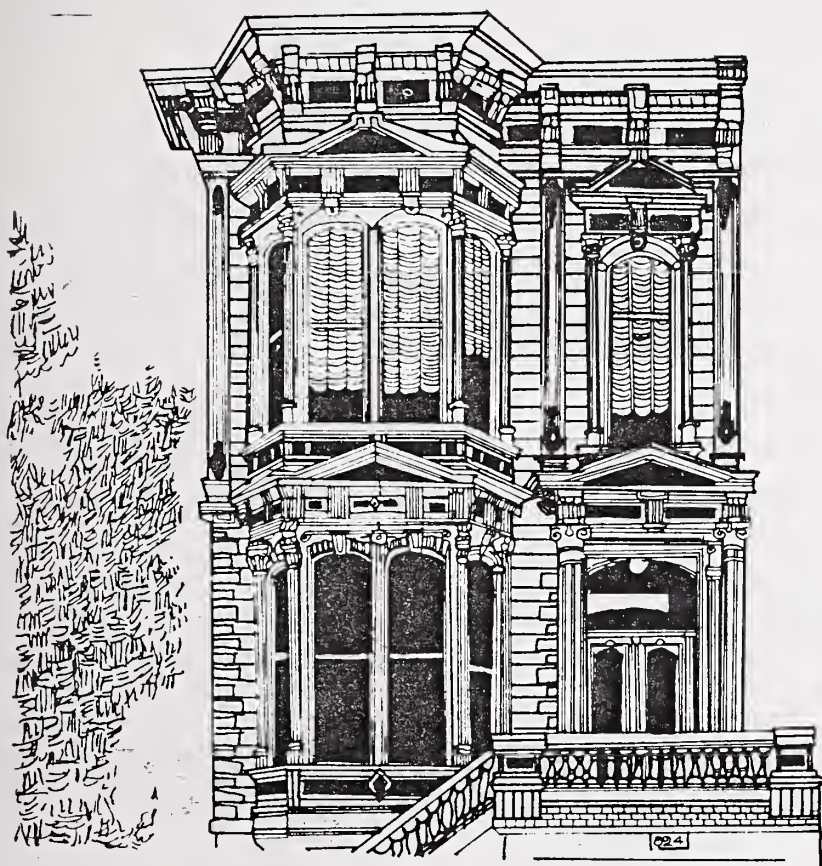


This house was built for John C. Mitchell, who was listed in the 1873 City Directory as an insurance broker with the Hamburg-Bremen Fire Insurance Company. It was described as a one-family house when the water service was connected on June 5, 1871.

The exterior design combines Italianate and Second Empire details, with the quoins and arches being typical of the Second Empire. The exterior color scheme, while conforming to today's color preferences, is quite appropriate to the period of the house.

Upon entering the house, one is quite impressed by the ornate stained glass panels in the front doors. The door panels are original, but the transom containing the house number, although compatible with the door panels, is more recent.

The interior is distinguished by the elaborate plaster ornamentation throughout the house. The original gas fixtures in all the rooms are still in working order. Of particular interest in this house is the newly-painted stenciling in the front hall. This traditional Victorian decorative treatment is enjoying a revival now that artisans are learning the technique. The spectacular marble walls in the bathrooms are also painted, as are the ceiling and wall decorations in the dining room.



M. STEIN '76

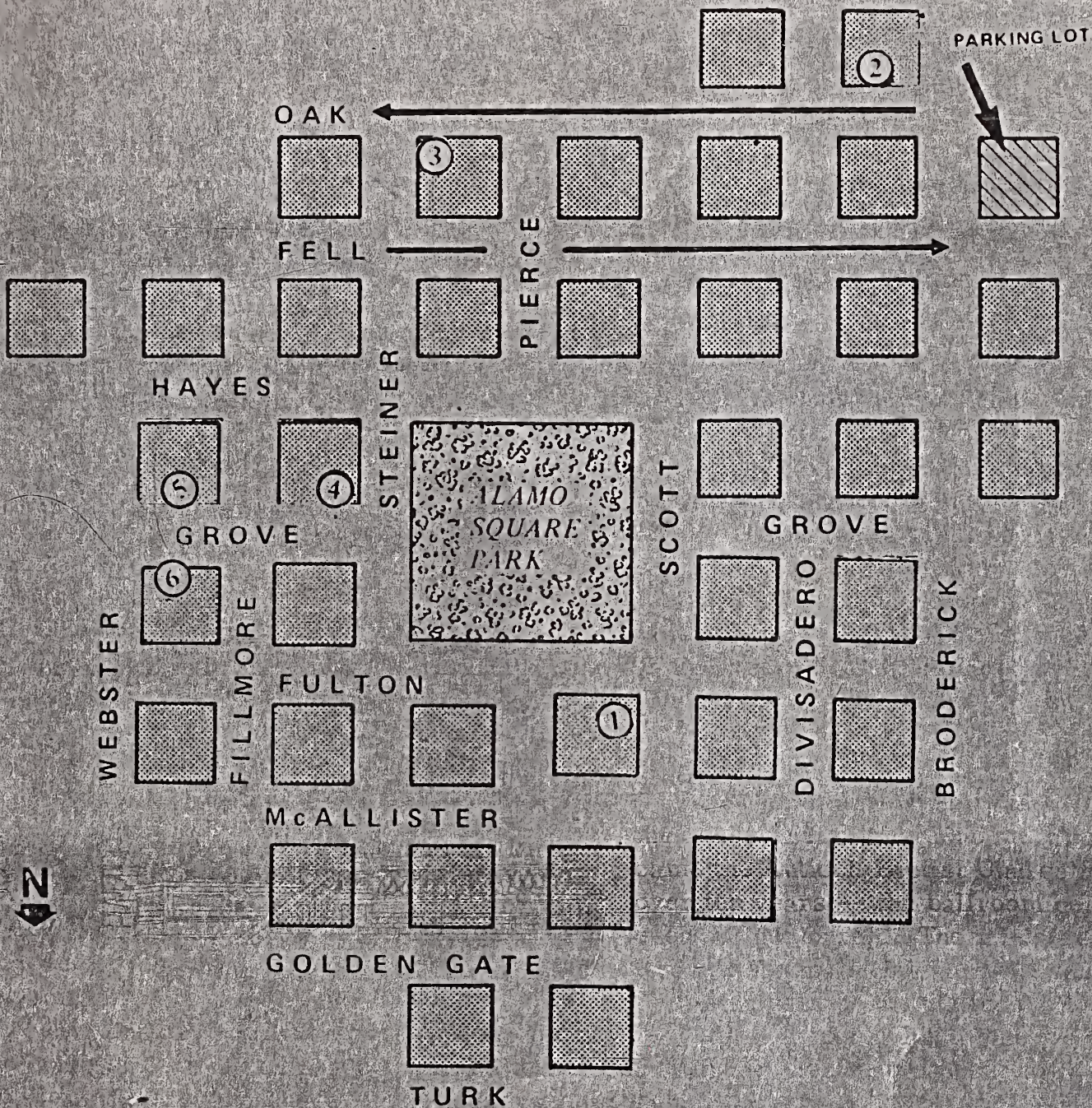
Henry Brune, of Naber, Alfs & Brune (Phoenix Bourbon Whiskey Co.) employed Henry Geilfuss to design and construct this house in 1886. The Brune family lived here from 1886 through 1906 when, after the fire, they moved to Ross. The family was listed in the San Francisco Blue Book of Society as being "at home" Tuesdays.

When intervening owners sold the house in the early 1950's, it became the Antioch Baptist Church for over ten years -- the ballroom being used as the church. The minister lived on the main floor and the second floor was used as a flat, then a room-

ing house. The project of the church to rip off the front of the house and combine the basement and first floor into a new church auditorium was fought by irate neighbors, and the building was bought and then resold to its present owner.

The architecture is basically Italianate with some Eastlake in the exterior decoration. The interior, with its 15-foot high ceilings and classical Greek and Roman woodwork, has a grand scale. The double drawing room is divided by columns with Corinthian capitals; the dining room extends the full width of the house and is dominated by a monumental sideboard. The smaller morning room has an adjoining conservatory which has been re-designed to provide an entryway and light for a small apartment in the former servants' quarters.

The five bedrooms on the second floor take advantage of every usable square foot of space. The main bathroom has its original fixtures (with new copper piping). The house was very modern for its time, with coal-burning central heating; electric starters for the gas lights and bell and speaking tube systems. The front porch was changed in 1972 to incorporate garage, deck and new front stairs. The stenciled ceiling in the master bedroom will be featured soon in a national preservation magazine in an article about this newly-revived Victorian decorative treatment.



① 1198 FULTON

② THE PHELPS HOUSE

③ 601 STEINER

④ 722 STEINER

⑤ 813 GROVE

⑥ 824 GROVE

HOW TO RESEARCH THE HISTORY OF YOUR HOUSE(S)

I. Get a complete list of owners through the years.

- A. In the Assessor's Office (Room 101 City Hall), in the Sales Ledgers, organized by Block and Lot, you can find all the owners since 1914.
- B. At California Historical Society (CHS), Pacific at Laguna, in the S.F. Block Books you can find owners in 1894, 1901, Jan. 1906, Oct. 1906, and 1909.
- C. Here Today may list your original owners etc.
- D. The research files for Here Today, in the S.F. History Room of the Main Library, contain information and houses that didn't "make" the book. Accuracy and sources are not optimum, but you may find a construction date from the Water Department, which is miserly with its files.
- E. See II.E.
- F. See III.F.

II. Find out who the owners were and any other information about them.

- A. Search in City Directories, preferably year by year. They're available at CHS, in the S.F. History and Periodicals Rooms of the Main Library, at the Society of California Pioneers (456 McAllister), and at Sutro Library (Golden Gate near Parker).
- B. Check out their business ads etc. in City Directories and as suggested by the librarian.
- C. Ask oldest inhabitants; get on the phone to previous owners or their descendants.
- D. Verify this memory information in City Directories.
- E. Find your house(s) in the 1880 Census (on microfilm by ward at the S.F. Genealogical Society at CHS and at Sutro Library). It gives the head of household, his age, occupation, place of birth and his parents' places of birth; plus all the other residents, their relationship to head, their age, etc. These are occupiers, not necessarily owners, and you can check them forward and backwards in the City Directories.
- F. CHS has a book listing real property owned by individuals (alphabetically arranged) in about 1897. It's with the Block Books.

III. Discover original date and design.

- A. See I. C and D.
- B. If you have an idea of the house's date, you can try to find its sale in the Real Estate Circular, available for the 1870's in the S.F. History Room. It came out at the end of the month for which it's named, and it lists sales by street in the order of streets on the map. You learn the price and date.
- C. After success in III.D, go to the Sutro Library for the San Francisco Newsletter. You will find, under sales by date, grantor and grantee, which MAY give you the builder and first owner. The search is laborious. Suggest you skim by street name.

- D. If you have an idea of the house's date, but it was after 1880, try C above.
- E. If you've found an architect, look him/her up in Here Today, p. 329-330, in Hittel's California's Architectural Frontier, and as librarians suggest. Ask at different libraries.
- F. You can TRY to look at the Water Department's (425 Mason) records for the house(s). They don't like to show them, as they still use them. Do all the other research first and bring it with you, so they know you're serious. The record shows date of water connection and reconnections, and who signed for it--but watch out for erasures. You can probably also find increase or decrease in number of bathrooms, units, etc., indicating remodeling etc. Be careful and take you time and get everything. You won't get another look.
- G. If you've found builder Hollis (TREA--The Real Estate Associates) or Hinkel (or Hinkle), check my articles on them in The Webster Row Houses (proposed) Historic District file at City Planning, 100 Larkin.
- H. If you've found architect John C. Pelton, Jr., check his Cheap Dwellings, S.F. 1882, at the College of Environmental Design, U.C. Berkeley.

IV. Document the different uses and remodelings.

- A. See II. C, D and E.
- B. Look in the files of the Bureau of Building Inspection (450 McAllister), organized by address.
- C. Ask to see the Assessor's Record. They prefer to show it to owners only. Do this also at the end of your research so they'll know you're serious. The key person is Gale Blosser.
- D. See III.F.

V. Other useful sources

- A. For the 1870's: City Directories, "Progress of the City" section at the beginning.
- B. S.F. Law Library, 4th floor City Hall, indexes of lawsuits by names of the parties, and then ... but ask.
- C. California Architect and Builder, begun in 1880, individual issues available at CHS and at the College of Environmental Design.
- D. State Death Index (or the City's), Department of Public Health 101 Grove, for dates of death so you can find obituaries, which can be read on microfilm in the Newspaper Room of the Main Library.
- E. The Bancroft Library, Berkeley (facing the Campanile).
- F. Illustrated catalogues of builders' suppliers; for instance at CHS, of B. and J.S. Doe, manufacturers of doors and windows. You get names of companies from the Classified in City Directories, then look for them in the card catalogue.

by Anne Bloomfield
for the Victorian Alliance

